

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 179393

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NASA, MA, US

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSPAPER REPORT ON NASA CLOSING

REF: TANANARIVE 1337

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF "INFLAMATORY" NEWS ITEM FROM SOUTH AFRICAN PAPER "RAND DAILY MAIL" AS CARRIED BY AP AND PRESS GUIDANCE THAT DEPT USED. BEGIN TEXT OF NEWS ITEM: QUOTE JOHANNESBURG SOUTH AFRICA - (AP). THE RAND DAILY MAIL SAID TODAY THAT AMERICAN TECHNICIANS, ACTING ON ORDERS OF NASA, "DESTROYED" A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR U.S. SPACE TRACKING STATION ON MADAGASCAR CLEARLY "BECAUSE THEY FEARED IT MIGHT FALL INTO COMMUNIST HANDS." THE NEWSPAPER SAID NASA ORDERED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FACILITY LAST FRIDAY AFTER A DISPUTE IN WHICH THE MALAGASY GOVERNMENT ISSUED WHAT AMOUNTED TO AN ULTIMATUM OF EITHER PAYING MORE OR ABANDONING THE STATION ON THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND 250 MILES OFF THE COAST OF AFRICA. THE ULTIMATUM WAS TRANSMITTED TO WASHINGTON LAST WEEK AND AT 6:00 P.M.

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FRIDAY NASA ORDERED THE TRACKING FACILITY TO BE RENDERED

"INOPERATIVE", IT SAID.

IGNORING MALAGASY GUARDS SURROUNDING THE FACILITY, U.S. TECHNICIANS REMOVED VITAL PARTS FROM MACHINES, DISABLED COMPUTERS AND CARTED AWAY CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS WHICH WERE LATER BURNED, THE NEWSPAPER SAID. SECRET RECORDINGS, TELEMTRY INSTRUMENTS, HIGHLY CLASSIFIED MASTER TAPES CONTROLLING INFORMATION-GATHERING OPERATIONS BY SATELLITE AND RECONNAISSANCE CAMERAS SUCH AS THOSE USED IN CERTAIN SATELLITES WERE ALSO DESTROYED, IT SAID.

"IT HAS BEEN REPORTED THAT PRESIDENT D. RATSIRAKA, WHO NEEDS FOREIGN AID, HAD CONSIDERED CAPTURING THE AMERICAN INSTALLATION, USING THE FLIMSIEST OF EXCUSES, AND AFTER A PERIOD OF GRACE, HANDING IT OVER TO THE COMMUNISTS IN EXCHANGE FOR FINANCIAL AID," THE PAPER SAID.

RATSIRAKA'S NEW SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL TOOK POWER AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF COL. RATSIMANDRAVA, MADAGASCAR'S FORMER HEAD OF STATE, IN FEBRUARY. IT HAD TURNED TO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST RHETORIC IN RECENT MONTHS. END QUOTE.

2. BEGIN TEXT OF PRESS GUIDANCE. QUOTE THE REPORT IN THE RAND DAILY MAIL THAT AMERICAN TECHNICIANS ON ORDERS FROM NASA HAVE "DESTROYED" THE TRACKING STATION IN MADAGASCAR IS UTTERLY FALSE. THE STATION REMAINS UNDAMAGED AND IS UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE MALAGASY GOVERNMENT. IT WAS CLOSED ON JULY 14 AT THE REQUEST OF THE MALAGASY GOVERNMENT AND WE HAVE ONLY LIMITED ACCESS TO IT. CURRENTLY THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IS DISCUSSING WITH THE MALAGASY GOVERNMENT THE REMOVAL OF U.S. EQUIPMENT. THESE DISCUSSIONS ARE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE. END QUOTE. INGERSOLL

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